

COVER ESSAY

Anti-tobacco posters in Brazil: fighting smoking with humour, satire, and ridicule

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In 1986, cigarette consumption reached its highest level in Brazil, totalling 1950 cigarettes per person 18 years of age or older.¹ Up to that time, campaigns against smoking were practically unknown to the population. The National Programme of Tobacco Control had only begun during the previous year.² Thus, in the absence of countervailing influences, only a few factors were necessary to increase and maintain that high rate of cigarette smoking: the advertising and marketing strategies adopted by the tobacco industry and a strengthening of the population's buying power.³

In 1986, Dr Hilton Augusto Koch was coordinator of Brazil's National Campaign Against Cancer (CNCC), the programme in charge of cancer control for the country. The CNCC was based in Rio de Janeiro and was affiliated with the Brazilian health ministry. Dr Augusto Koch convened a meeting that year where participants discussed ways to conduct an effective tobacco control programme and to achieve a meaningful change in the social aspects of smoking.

Cartoonist Ziraldo Alves Pinto was invited to join in the discussion during the meeting. His presence took on special significance, since Ziraldo had achieved great influence in the media and public for his no-nonsense cartoon characters and scripts.

Ziraldo expressed the opinion that the question of tobacco addiction should be dealt with through a change in *population* behaviour. He felt that the sheer information about the health hazards of smoking and "the discourse of evil" would not by themselves promote a change in the behaviour of smokers or non-smokers. He contended that it was necessary to create a message with wider appeal that would reach smokers more directly, robbing smoking of the glamour once assigned to it, and above all, portraying the ludicrous and socially inadequate features of smoking. He believed that, in so doing, smoking would lose its "movie star" image, and smokers would have to face the scorn of playing the role of the "bad guy". Ziraldo's strategy was rooted in his view that people are far more concerned about their social performance than about their health status.

After receiving unanimous approval at the meeting, the artist created a series of five posters in which he expressed his views of a socially targeted campaign against smoking. He avoided the universally accepted "terrorist" approach of associating smoking with



prisons, skulls, sick lungs, ghosts, tombs, coffins, and cemeteries. Instead, he applied messages based on humour to posters of high graphic quality, making them appropriate for use in any social setting. In satirising and ridiculing smoking, his posters represented the ideal approach to confront the marketing programmes of the tobacco industry.

Four of the five posters are reproduced in their original form on the cover of this issue of *Tobacco Control*; the fifth, also in colour in its original form, is reproduced in black and white with this cover essay. The Portuguese words in the posters may be translated into English as follows: 1) Smoking is pathetic, 2) Smoking is old-fashioned, 3) Smoking is tacky, 4) Smoking is corny, and 5) Smoking is in bad taste.

At first, 30000 sets of the posters were distributed to the main opinion-makers in the country, including TV and movie stars, journalists, writers, movie makers, scholars, and politicians. Another 200 000 sets were then distributed to schools, health centres, business enterprises, the media, etc. This material was highly acclaimed by all sectors of society, and the enormous demand for more sets led us to distribute another 500 000 sets among the 27 states of the country and their 5000 municipalities.

The initiative received massive media sup-

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port and left a positive and permanent mark on actions against smoking in Brazil. The posters were subsequently reproduced within individual states, and a total of one million sets were ultimately distributed.

In 1987, Ziraldo Alves Pinto was awarded a World Health Organisation medal for Tobacco or Health, for his excellent contribution to the campaign. Since then, social communication strategies have become fully integrated into tobacco control activities in Brazil, giving permanency to tobacco control efforts and helping those efforts to become inserted into the social fabric of the population.

A curious development occurred in Roraima, in the North of Brazil, from where we received a communication asking us not to send them the posters "Smoking is tacky" and "Smoking is corny". We were told that the characters in those posters portrayed that population's perfect model for fashionable people, even though such characters were undoubtedly considered out of fashion to the southern populations. Thus, the north only worked with the other

three posters, which emphasizes the fact that there is little or no material adopting a behavioural and social approach that can be used countrywide.

Fortunately, tobacco use has decreased in Brazil from 150 billion cigarettes consumed in 1986 to 128 billion in 1992. In addition to the national campaign against smoking carried out by the Health Ministry, especially that of Ziraldo Alves Pinto, several other factors contributed to lower smoking rates in the Brazilian population.² Nevertheless, Ziraldo's campaign had tremendous impact and left an indelible imprint on the tobacco control campaign in Brazil, which continues to be coordinated by the Health Ministry's National Cancer Institute.

1 *Tobacco control: a challenge*. 1st edn, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Ministério da Saúde, Instituto Nacional de Câncer, 1992.

2 *Tobacco or health: status in the Americas. A report of the Pan American Health Organization*. Washington, DC: PAHO, 1992: 63-80. (PAHO Scientific Publication No 536.)

3 *Falando sobre tabagismo*. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Ministério da Saúde, Instituto Nacional de Câncer, 1992.